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# **SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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## **Students improve performance on PACT; gains made by African-American, low-income students**

*EDITOR'S NOTE – State, district and school-level scores may be accessed through the State Department of Education's website. State Superintendent Tenenbaum's comments are available on Press Box (803-799-2001, Ext. 1100).*

COLUMBIA – South Carolina students are making progress on PACT, showing improvement at almost every grade level, State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum announced today.

The greatest gains in 2002 PACT results were in mathematics – particularly in grades 4, 5 and 6, where the percentage of students scoring Basic and Above increased by seven or more percentage points. Substantial improvement also was evident among African-American students and students from low-income families.

More than 300,000 students in grades 3-8 participated last spring in South Carolina's fourth administration of the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests, which measure student progress toward the state's rigorous curriculum standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Tenenbaum released the results today at a news conference at Hopkins Elementary School in Richland School District 1.

Over the four-year period that PACT tests have been administered, more than 31,000 students have raised their performance from Below Basic to the Basic level or higher.

"These results are another affirmation of the progress we're making," said State Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum. "As I've said before, true improvement takes time, but these results demonstrate that we're on the right track. We're committed to staying the course."

PACT scores are key components in South Carolina's annual School Report Cards that rate elementary and middle schools, as well as school districts, as Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average or Unsatisfactory. Under the Education Accountability Act of 1998, the state provides specialized assistance to schools and districts that have Unsatisfactory or Below Average ratings. (High schools are rated by a formula that uses High School Exit Exam scores and percentages of students eligible for LIFE Scholarships.)

Students who score Below Basic in one or both subjects must have academic plans developed that address how the students' weaknesses will be remediated – either during the school year, in after-school programs, summer school or any combination of the three.

This year's scores were released in conjunction with the new federal testing report required by the No Child Left Behind Act signed by President Bush earlier this year. Because NCLB's reporting requirements differ slightly from the way the state has previously reported PACT scores, comparisons among prior years are limited. The state did recalculate 2001 scores to fit NCLB rules so that progress from 2001 to 2002 could be reported. *(For more details, see the note at the end of this news release).*

"This is just a different way of reporting the data," Tenenbaum said. "We will continue to provide schools with PACT scores for all students so that they have the data they need to make educational decisions."

Results were originally scheduled to be released Sept. 18, but the State Department of Education discovered two days earlier that an incomplete calculation was used to realign 2001 PACT data to the NCLB reporting format. Although scattered critics called the delay a political tactic, Tenenbaum said the recalculated results actually were lower than what would have been reported earlier.

"We are absolutely committed to providing only the most accurate information," said the State Superintendent. "When our statisticians discovered the error, the only responsible thing to do was to delay the release until we could recalculate and confirm the data."

Tenenbaum said that the delay in reporting PACT results will not impact the release of school and district report cards scheduled for Oct. 31.

NCLB calls for all students in America to score at the proficient level by 2014, and Tenenbaum said South Carolina is making progress toward that goal. For example, the percentage of fourth-graders scoring proficient and advanced in mathematics increased from 26 percent in 2001 to 36 percent in 2002. In every area, however, she stressed that continued improvement is needed – particularly in the upper-grade levels. Students in the early grades have had the benefit of South Carolina's new standards-based instruction from the start of their academic years, she said.

PACT results are divided into four categories. Passing scores are Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. Students who score in the Basic category have at least met the minimum expectations for performance based on the curriculum standards. Those who score in the Proficient category have met the expectations for performance and are well prepared for the next grade. Students who score in the Advanced category have exceeded the expectations for student performance and are very well prepared for the next grade.

Students who score in the Below Basic category did not meet the minimum expectations on curriculum standards to pass the test and are not prepared for the next grade.

PACT replaced BSAP (the Basic Skills Assessment Program). A considerably more rigorous testing program, PACT requires essay responses, showing math calculations, completing charts or diagrams and editing paragraphs.

In addition to English Language Arts and Mathematics, students will be tested in Science and Social Studies for the first time in the spring of 2003.

PACT highlights from 2002 include:

- Fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade Mathematics – These three grade levels had the best improvement in students scoring Basic or above for either subject. The percentage of fourth-graders increased 7.2 percentage points, from 67.1 percent in 2001 to 74.3 percent in 2002. The percentage of fifth-graders increased 7.9 percentage points, from 62.1 percent in 2001 to 70 percent in 2002. The percentage of sixth-graders increased 6.9 percentage points, from 62.8 percent in 2001 to 69.7 percent in 2002.
- African-American students – The percentage of African-American students scoring Basic and above in English Language Arts rose from 58.4 percent in 2001 to 61.2 percent in 2002, and in Mathematics from 46.6 percent to 51.6 percent. White students scoring Basic and above in English Language Arts rose from 83.7 percent in 2001 to 84.8 percent in 2002, and in Mathematics from 76.7 percent to 80.4 percent.
- Low-income students – Improvement also has been impressive for students whose family income is low enough to qualify them to receive free or reduced-price lunches. The percent of students on subsidized meals scoring Basic and above in English Language Arts increased from 60.2 percent in 2001 to 63.3 percent in 2002, and in Mathematics rose from 49.4 percent to 55.4 percent. Students who paid for their meals scoring Basic and above in English Language Arts increased from 85.6 percent in 2001 to 86.9 percent in 2002, and in Mathematics from 78.4 percent to 81.8 percent.

A number of ongoing initiatives are designed to continue improvements in student achievement, Tenenbaum said. Among those are:

- *Full-day kindergarten, First Steps and legislative funding to reduce class sizes in grades 1-3* – A strong academic foundation early in students' academic careers is more likely to lead to further success.
- *Benchmark tests* – The State Department of Education has developed tests that classroom teachers can use to measure student progress toward state standards.
- *Lesson plans* – The Education Department has developed "curriculum implementation guides" that offer teachers sample lesson plans to address specific academic standards.
- *Mentor* – This software familiarizes teachers with the review and comments on extended response writing samples so they become more familiar with the process and performance standards. Teachers also learn more about scoring rubrics.
- *South Carolina: Teaching, Learning, Connecting (SCTLC)* – Each month, more than 32,000 educators log on to this site that has thousands of lesson plans, test items and links to curriculum resources. All SCTLC resources support state standards.
- *School Leadership Executive Institute* – The Institute provides South Carolina principals with the kind of intensive, specialized training made available to top business executives.
- *African-American Achievement* – A committee of community leaders has developed a plan to address the academic and cultural barriers that may impede the academic performance of African-American students.
- *Teacher pay* – Hodges and Tenenbaum support raising South Carolina's average teacher salary to the national average so that South Carolina can offer salaries that compete with Georgia, North Carolina and other states for top-quality teaching talent.

## Summary of PACT results

### Grade 3

- English Language Arts – The percentage of students scoring at the Basic Level or above increased from 78.7 to 79.9 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 21.3 to 20.1 percent.
- Mathematics – The percentage of students scoring at the Basic Level or above increased from 72.1 to 73.6 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 27.9 to 26.4 percent.

### Grade 4

- English Language Arts – The percentage of students at the Basic Level or above decreased from 80 to 79.6 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic increased from 20 to 20.4 percent.
- Mathematics – The percentage of students scoring at the Basic Level or above increased from 67.1 to 74.3 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 32.9 to 25.7 percent.

### Grade 5

- English Language Arts – The percentage of students at the Basic Level or above increased from 73.2 to 74.2 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 26.8 to 25.8 percent.
- Mathematics – The percentage of students scoring at the Basic Level or above increased from 62.1 to 70 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 37.9 to 30 percent.

### Grade 6

- English Language Arts – The percentage of students scoring at the Basic Level or above increased from 68.1 to 71.7 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 31.9 to 28.3 percent.
- Mathematics – The percentage of students scoring at the Basic Level or above increased from 62.8 to 69.7 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 37.2 to 30.3 percent.

### Grade 7

- English Language Arts – The percentage of students at the Basic Level or above increased from 68.6 to 73.2 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 31.4 to 26.8 percent.
- Mathematics – The percentage of students scoring at the Basic Level or above increased from 56.9 to 60.1 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 43.1 to 39.9 percent.

### Grade 8

- English Language Arts – The percentage of students at the Basic Level or above increased from 69.3 to 69.5 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic decreased from 30.7 to 30.5 percent.
- Mathematics – The percentage of students scoring at the Basic Level or above decreased from 62.4 to 61.7 percent; the percentage scoring Below Basic increased from 37.6 to 38.3 percent.

*SPECIAL NOTE ON PACT SCORE CALCULATIONS: South Carolina tests all children enrolled in grades 3-8 during PACT testing each spring. Prior to this year, all of their scores were reported each September. However, the new federal NCLB regulations affect all states, and the annual testing report mandated by NCLB specifies that states report only the scores of students enrolled by the 45<sup>th</sup> day of school. This method is one that South Carolina also uses to determine district and school ratings on the annual School Report Cards mandated by the EAA. The idea is that*

*this method holds districts and schools accountable only for the learning of students who have had adequate instruction and preparation time.*

*When PACT scores were released in previous years, scores for students tested “off grade-level” were not reported. For example, if a fifth-grade special education student had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that allowed that student to take third-grade PACT tests, that student’s scores did not count on the statewide PACT, although they did count as part of the school and district report cards released later in the year. Under NCLB, however, off-grade level scores are part of both the initial PACT Report and the school and district cards.*

*For these two reasons, the school, district and state summary data in the PACT Report will not precisely match the summary data included on the individual student reports that districts are using in their conversations with parents concerning the progress of individual students.*

*This is a technical reporting issue only. PACT scores of individual students are not affected in any way.*